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## **WALL STREET JOURNAL**

### **Democrats Criticize EPA Chief On Perchlorate Contamination**

By PETER WALDMAN  
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Senior Democrats in Congress chastised Administrator Christine Todd Whitman of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for allegedly lax action on perchlorate contamination and for muzzling EPA scientists, as opponents gear up to combat a Pentagon proposal that may exempt perchlorate polluters from legal and financial liability.

In a letter to Ms. Whitman sent Thursday, Democratic Sens. Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, Barbara Boxer of California and Harry Reid of Nevada demanded the lifting of a recent gag order on EPA staff from speaking publicly about perchlorate risks. The senators also requested a special EPA briefing on perchlorate before Tuesday, the day the Senate Armed Services Committee is due to begin marking up the Defense Department reauthorization bill.

Perchlorate, the main explosive component of solid-rocket fuel, was widely spilled during the Cold War and has turned up in water supplies in recent years in some 20 states.

Last year, the EPA suggested perchlorate may pose health dangers to humans, particularly to infants, in drinking-water concentrations above one part per billion. The Pentagon and some of its contractors, which could face billions of dollars in cleanup liability for the contaminant, say perchlorate is safe in drinking water at levels to as much as 200 parts per billion. The Bush administration recently referred the debate to the National Academy of Sciences for further review.

In its current form, the Senate's defense reauthorization bill includes the administration's proposals to improve combat "readiness" by exempting the Pentagon and some of its private contractors from environmental laws on "operational training ranges." Opponents argue that could include nearly any site, whether publicly or privately owned, in use or not in use.

"It is unconscionable that EPA's public-health experts, whose job it is to protect the American people from such toxins, have been barred from commenting on the dangers posed by perchlorate exposure," the three senators wrote in their letter to Ms. Whitman. The gag order applies to all EPA scientists and regulators, pending completion of the National Academy of Sciences review.

On the House side, Rep. John Dingell (D., Mich.) asked Ms. Whitman Thursday to "act immediately" to force the Pentagon to disclose all U.S. sites where perchlorate is known to

contaminate water supplies. Although the agency formally requested such a survey from the Defense Department in 1999, Mr. Dingell said he was "shocked" to learn recently that the Pentagon never complied with the EPA's request.

Ms. Whitman's press secretary, Lisa Harrison, said the Congressional letters arrived late Thursday and are under review.

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